

# Ford: Plain Words Before an Open Door

Reporter Godfrey Sperling: "Do you plan to have a code of ethics for the Executive Branch?"

President Gerald Ford: "The code of ethics that will be followed will be the example that I set."

In that extraordinary exchange—unthinkable at a presidential press conference in pre-Watergate days—Gerald Ford last week effectively summed up the homespun precepts that will guide his Administration. "I will be as candid and as forthright as I possibly can," he promised. "I will expect any individuals in my Administration to be exactly the same. There will be no tightly controlled operation of the White House staff." He firmly added: "I will make the decisions and take the blame for them or whatever benefit might be the case."

The declaration of principle came midway through the third full week of the Ford presidency, a week in which he turned from healing the wounds of Watergate to dealing with the nation's bread-and-butter problems. Almost daily, Ford met with members of his staff and Cabinet to discuss the country's economic ills (see cover story page 22) and to review plans for the two-day economic summit conference of businessmen, labor leaders and economists that will take place later this month.

He also took steps to cement U.S. ties abroad. Press Secretary J.F. terHorst said that Ford has accepted an invitation to visit Rumania, probably some time after his trip to Japan in late fall. President Giovanni Leone of Italy will make a state visit to Washington on Sept. 25, and Communist Party Secretary Edward Gierek of Poland will visit for two days in early October. This week the U.S. and East Germany are due to establish diplomatic relations.

**No Resemblance.** Ford's press conference was his first as President but the 56th that he has held since Dec. 6, when he was inaugurated as Vice President. It took place in the White House's East Room, which was jammed with newsmen, just as it had been for his predecessor's infrequent sessions with reporters—37 in 5½ years as President. But there the resemblance to the Nixon press conferences ended.

To underscore the informal tone that he has set for his presidency, Ford dispensed with Nixon's trappings—a stagey backdrop of blue velvet draperies and a massive, bulletproof lectern. Instead, Ford stood before a door that was symbolically left open and used a narrow, hourglass-shaped stand. He wore no makeup; despite the bright lights for the television cameras, he did not perspire. He seemed relaxed and self-as-

sured—in part perhaps because he had carefully gone over the issues with five key aides for two hours on Tuesday and for another hour the morning of the press conference. Still, he and his staff had not anticipated fully one-third of the reporters' questions.

Ford had no big news to announce; the significance of the session lay in the re-establishment of regularly scheduled press conferences. In 29 minutes, Ford answered 27 questions, demonstrating his ability to field inquiries on a broad variety of foreign and domestic subjects—and his skill at gracefully evading those he did not wish to answer fully. Highlights:

## CLEMENCY FOR NIXON.

Subscribing to the theory that the former President has suffered enough, Ford did not rule out the possibility of pardoning Nixon. The President added, however, that Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski "has an obligation to take whatever action he sees fit in conformity with his oath of office." The answer seemed to signal Jaworski to begin the prosecution of Nixon, if it is warranted by the evidence, but seemed also to hint that the President is inclined to step in at some point during the legal process and pardon Nixon. When or if that might happen was left unclear. Said Ford: "There have been no charges made, there has been no action by the courts, there has been no action by any jury, and until any legal process has been undertaken, I think it is unwise and untimely for me to make any commitment."

## THE ECONOMY.

To fight inflation, Ford said that he intends to hold federal spending this year to less than \$300 billion, a cut of \$5.5 billion "at a minimum" from the fiscal 1975 budget that Nixon sought from Congress. The President reiterated his opposition to reimposing wage and price controls but said that he would consider recommending a massive public-employment program if unemployment significantly worsens. His statements seemed to set some limits on the kind of recommendations for fighting inflation and unemployment that he is willing to accept from the economic summit meeting.

## THE VICE PRESIDENT.

Ford said that he has "a lot of ideas" for making use of Nelson Rockefeller after he is confirmed as Vice President by Congress, but gave only scanty details about what they may be. He said that Rockefeller will be assigned a role in formulating domestic policies and legislation. Further, Ford said that his Vice President "can make a significant con-



FORD AT NEW LECTERN

DIRCK HALSTEAD



## THE NATION

tribution to some of our decision making in the area of foreign policy" and "can be helpful . . . in the political arena under certain guidelines and some restrictions." But Ford did not say what Rockefeller's precise role in foreign policy and partisan politics will be. Nor would Ford say whether Rockefeller will be his running mate in 1976, though the President called the two of them "a good team."

### RELATIONS WITH CUBA.

Ford said that the U.S. might be willing to soften its policy toward Communist Cuba if that nation first "changes its policy toward us and toward its Latin neighbors." But he promised that the U.S. would act only "in concert with the other members of the Organization of American States." In 1964, the U.S. and all other OAS member states except Mexico broke their diplomatic relations with Cuba. However cautiously phrased, Ford's statement was a major departure from his predecessor's hard-line stand against improving relations with Cuba.

Afterward, Ford seemed pleased with his own performance. "Well, that's the first one," he said with satisfaction to terHorst as they left the East Room. His reaction was shared by much of the nation's press. The *Wall Street Journal* editorially called the press conference one of the few in recent years "that gave a reasonably confident feeling of the scope and depth of the President's thinking and the evolving directions of policy."

There were also lighter moments. Ford met with eight teams that participated in the Little League World Series and accepted an autographed baseball from the winning pitcher of the championship team from Taiwan. The



JOHNSTON—WASHINGTON POST

ROCKEFELLER & BETTY, FORD & HAPPY, DANCING AT WHITE HOUSE PARTY  
An ability to field a variety of questions—and evade others.

evening of the press conference, the President and his wife celebrated its success at a small dinner party in the White House for Nelson and Happy Rockefeller that was attended by senior presidential aides, Cabinet members and their wives.

Following dinner, there was dancing in the Grand Foyer to the music of the Marine Dance Combo. Ford enlivened the party by frugging to the tune of *Proud Mary*, a rock hit of 1969. That night the Rockefellers became Ford's first overnight guests in the White House. Mrs. Ford offered them a choice

of two bedrooms—the Lincoln bedroom and the Queen's bedroom, where visiting royalty have stayed. The Rockefellers chose the century-old, 8-ft.-long rosewood bed in the Lincoln Room.

Ford ended the week by flying to Columbus to deliver the commencement address at Ohio State University, his second public appearance as President outside Washington. As some 10,000 graduating students and guests applauded, Ford described American youth as "our greatest untapped source of energy" in the struggle against inflation and other national problems. In a comparison of





**WITH TAIWAN TEAM PITCHER**  
*Steps to cement ties abroad.*

sorts, he also spoke admiringly of the Communist Chinese. "The majority of Chinese on the mainland are young people, highly motivated and extremely well disciplined," Ford said. "As fellow human beings, we celebrate the rising capacities of the Chinese nation, a people with a firm belief in their own destiny. As Americans motivated by free competition, we see a distant challenge. And I believe all Americans welcome that challenge." The next day, the Fords went to Camp David for their first weekend at the presidential retreat in Maryland's Catoctin Mountains.